# GRASSROOTS

Aboriginal Business in Alberta

Special Alberta Business Awards of Distinction edition WINTER 2009


# CELEBRATING THE BEST OF ABORIGINAL BUSINESS

Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) is again proud to sponsor two awards as part of the 2009 Alberta Business Awards of Distinction – the Aboriginal Relations Best Practice Award and the Eagle Feather Business Award.

The Aboriginal Relations Best Practice Award is given to a non-Aboriginal business that demonstrates outstanding achievements in Aboriginal relations, including economic development, employment and training, and Aboriginal community support.

The INAC Eagle Feather Business Award is given to an Aboriginal-owned business that has incorporated both entrepreneurial and cultural concepts into its operation for long-term success.

The Aboriginal population is the fastest growing demographic in Alberta and Canada, taking an increasingly prominent role in the economies of both.

The Government of Canada believes that increasing Aboriginal participation in the economy is the most effective way to improve the socio-economic conditions of Aboriginal people in Canada. All Canadians benefit from strong, healthy, self-reliant Aboriginal people and communities.

In Budget 2009, the Government took very important steps to help Aboriginal people with workforce training opportunities by investing an additional $100 million over three years in the Aboriginal skills and employment partnership. This is expected to support the creation of 6,000 jobs for Aboriginal Canadians. In addition, the Government is investing $75 million in a two-year Aboriginal skills and training strategic investment fund.

In the coming months, Canada will introduce a new Aboriginal economic development framework. To support this framework, the government led a substantial external engagement process in tandem with a broad, web-based process.

The Alberta Business Awards of Distinction will honour the best and the brightest in Alberta business at a gala evening February 27, 2009 at the River Cree Resort and Casino on the Enoch Nation just west of Edmonton. In this special edition of *Grassroots* INAC is pleased to profile the eight finalists for the Aboriginal Relations Best Practice Award and the Eagle Feather Business Award.

## IN THIS ISSUE:


- ✔ Peace Hills Trust – Serving the needs of Aboriginal people and businesses (page 1)
- ✔ Savanna Energy – Partnering with First Nations across the oilfields (page 2)
- ✔ Compass Group Canada / ESS Support Services – Delivering services and providing jobs (page 3)
- ✔ Lifestyles Fitness and Health Concepts – More than just workouts and weights (page 4)
- ✔ Aqua Industrial – A leader in northern Alberta business (page 5)
- ✔ Aseniwuche Development Corporation – Moving progressively forward (page 6)
- ✔ Canada Safeway – A long commitment to working with Aboriginal [illegible] (page 7)


# PEACE HILLS TRUST

## Serving the financial needs of Aboriginal people and businesses

Peace Hills Trust is Canada's first and largest First Nation trust company, wholly owned by the Samson Cree Nation of Hobbema, Alberta.

Incorporated in 1980, the company now provides complete financial services to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal clients through a network of regional offices and electronic services that stretches over most of the country. Corporate headquarters are located in Edmonton while the main office is located on the reserve at Hobbema, 100 kilometres southeast.

The trust company has 45 employees in Alberta. Seventy five additional staff work at regional offices in Kelowna, B.C., Fort Qu'Appelle and Saskatoon, Saskatchewan and Winnipeg, Manitoba. The company also has an office in Fredericton, New Brunswick that serves customers in the Atlantic region. Collectively, these offices take care of the financial needs of over 20,000 clients, including individuals, corporations, institutions and associations.

"Between our regional offices and the electronic services available we cover a significant amount of the Aboriginal population in Canada," said Gerry Kinsella, president and chief operating officer.

"While we are always looking at expansion – particularly in the North – we are quite pleased with what we have built over the past 25 years."

Peace Hills Trust has seen continued growth since it opened its Alberta operations in February 1982.

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- ✔ Canada Safeway – A true commitment to working with Aboriginal people (page 7)
- ✔ Devon Canada – "Committed to Excellence" (page 7)


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*Regional Managers Brayden Nichols and Stephen Buffalo lead the grand entry to the art show*

The corporation is committed to providing premium service to all its clients while building lasting relationships. Over 80 of their employees are Aboriginal - providing employment and career advancement opportunities - and the company believes in giving back to the people and organizations they serve through sponsorships and community involvement. Recognizing the importance of education, the trust company annually sponsors two $1,000 scholarships at the First Nations University of Canada in Regina and the University of New Brunswick, a $500 scholarship at Trent University in Peterborough, Ontario and bursaries of $5,000 and $1,000 at the University of Alberta and Northern Alberta Institute of Technology.

They also award $500 annually to a student at the Maskawachees Cultural College in Hobbema and have been leaders in encouraging native artists to develop, preserve and express their culture through their sponsorship of a national Aboriginal art contest and show.

*Previous 1st place winners at the art show*

Now in its 27th year, the contest awards over $4,000 in prizes to Aboriginal adult and youth artists as well as providing exposure on a national level. This year's winners will see their works exhibited along with all the other entries at the art show, which moves between cities where the company has offices. Next year's show will take place in Edmonton.

"The annual art contest and showing, like our support for post-secondary education, is an opportunity for us to give back to the communities at large and provide financial assistance in two areas of real significance to our people," said Kinsella. "It gives all of us at Peace Hills Trust a lot of satisfaction knowing we are nurturing our future leaders while also promoting and supporting Aboriginal art and artists."

PEACE HILLS TRUST®

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THE ALBERTA BUSINESS AWARDS OF DISTINCTION
Best Practices Award finalist

# SAVANNA ENERGY

## Partnering with First Nations across the oilfields

Savanna Energy Services Corporation has gained a reputation as "the Aboriginal drilling company" and it's a designation they wear with considerable pride. After all, partnerships with First Nations make up a large part of their extensive operations and the company goes to great pains to ensure the reputation and accompanying moniker are deserved.

*Apprentices at work on one of Savanna's rigs*

The company's core business is drilling and well servicing in the oilfields of western Canada, primarily Alberta. Through subsidiary companies, Savanna Energy Services also has operations in Saskatchewan, North Dakota, Texas and Louisiana. They operate the third-largest well drilling and fifth-largest well servicing fleet in Western Canada, having completed a merger with Western Lakota Energy Services Inc. in 2006 that has benefited both companies.

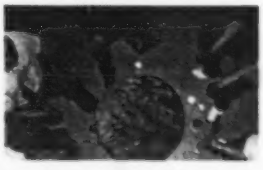
The company operates two divisions. The drilling division operates 107 drilling rigs and the well servicing side has 72 rigs. This equipment, along with other company businesses like oilfield rental operations, represents nearly a billion dollars in capital assets – much of it manufactured in Alberta. At peak operating periods, the company employs almost 2,600 employees.

The employees are a critical part of Savanna's success. Also crucial is the emphasis they place on Aboriginal partnerships, local hiring and training, and giving back to the communities they work with.

"Our employees are our most important assets," said Savanna Energy Services President and CEO Ken Mullen.

"To this end, we've designed a comprehensive, multi-faceted training program that covers all our divisions concerning safety and hazard identification, assessment and management. We also provide an intensive six-day training session for all our partnering communities and companies. It develops awareness of the energy service sector, promotes employee retention and ensures everyone involved is working to the exacting standards we insist on."

The company specifically created Aboriginal-staffed positions to work with their many First Nation and Métis partners. With 15 rigs in partnership, these key positions manage business development matters, engage partners at quarterly meetings in open, consistent dialogue and review operational performance, financial matters, and employment and training issues. The company goes out of its way to achieve a healthy, respectful and productive partnership in every agreement it reaches.



*Drum dance participants*

Employees are encouraged to volunteer in community building activities such as Habitat for Humanity and the United Way, among others. Savanna Energy Services supports a host of charities both financially and with manpower and resources, focusing on urban and rural hospitals and organizations dedicated to children, helping those less fortunate and people with serious or terminal illnesses. They also believe strongly in promoting education, particularly among Aboriginal youth. The company sponsors three-year bursaries worth $2,500 at both the Northern and Southern Alberta Institutes of Technology for Aboriginal students completing their first year of Petroleum Engineering Technology. They also recently matched a $10,000 donation to the University of Lethbridge supporting Aboriginal programming initiatives. A past winner of the Aboriginal Best Practices award in 1995, it's easy to see why they are a finalist again.

SAVANNA
Energy Services Corp

THE ALBERTA BUSINESS AWARDS OF DISTINCTION
Best Practices Award finalist

# COMPASS GROUP CANADA / ESS SUPPORT SERVICES

## Delivering services and providing jobs

ESS Support Services is an operating division of Compass Group Canada, which is part of world-wide food service industry leaders Compass Group PLC.

ESS Support Services provides complete services for camps and remote sites across the country. Food and lodging are the essentials of their far-flung operations – from diamond mines in the Northwest Territories to the thousands of oil sands workers in northern Alberta and to the exploration camps on the barren landscapes of Nunavut. But the company provides much more than the basics. Additional services include retail, lifestyle, life support, security, facility management and maintenance, supply and logistic and transportation needs.

"ESS Support Services is committed to providing all the services and facilities for employers and employees wherever their operations may be," said Compass Group Canada's Chief Executive Officer Jack MacDonald.

*A typical ESS Support Systems remote location facility*

"Given that a large number of our locations are in the west and more specifically here in Alberta, it's critically important that we work in partnership as equals with Aboriginal communities and companies."

Compass Group Canada, through its ESS Support Services operations, has embraced this philosophy wholeheartedly. The company's key core values are many, but two essential ones are a commitment to relationships based on respect, honesty, trust, fairness and transparency, and a commitment to diversity as a standard measure of business growth and success. The company feels strongly that healthy business growth occurs only when a community receives fair value for their participation. It believes a large part of that value is found in providing employment opportunities and other economic benefits for Aboriginal communities.

*Kitchen staff at a camp in northern Alberta*

Subsequently, all aspects of Aboriginal relations have been developed respecting traditional values while maintaining a constant awareness of the importance of Aboriginal partners, employees and the communities they inhabit. In 2007, ESS Support Services was responsible for injecting over $20 million into the national Aboriginal economy through joint venture partnerships, suppliers, employee payrolls and financial support to a number of Aboriginal organizations and institutions.

The company believes in maximizing employment and advancement opportunities for Aboriginal employees. In six years it has seen a 270 per cent increase in employees, focused on the communities where ESS Support Services is most active. Every year the company commits to Aboriginal employment objectives pegged at a minimum 10 per cent year-over-year increase. The goals are set according to region, occupation and management level and are monitored on a monthly basis. The focus over the last two years has been northern Alberta and they continue to achieve these lofty employment objectives annually.

*Dancers at ESS Support Service's Fort McKay festival*

Besides employment, ESS Support Services is a leader in other initiatives supporting Aboriginal communities. Again this year, the company is one of only nine to achieve Gold Level status (the highest designation possible) in the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business Progressive Aboriginal Relations program. They are a founding sponsor of the Aboriginal Business Hall of Fame, provide generous financial support to the Foundation for the Advancement of Aboriginal Youth and the Aboriginal Mentorship Program and are involved in many cultural, athletic and social activities throughout communities across Alberta.

COMPASS GROUP

Canada & ESS North America

THE ALBERTA BUSINESS AWARDS OF DISTINCTION
Eaglefeather Award finalist

# LIFESTYLES FITNESS AND HEALTH CONCEPTS

## More than just workouts and weights

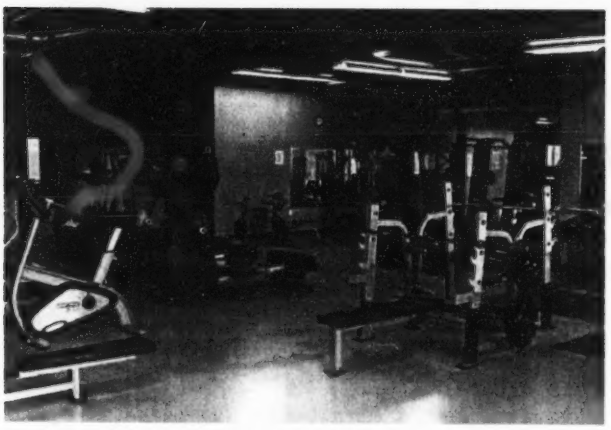
When Owner and Managing Director Patrick Gladue graduated from the University of Alberta with a Bachelor's degree in Physical Education, one of the first things he did was incorporate Lifestyles Fitness and Health Concepts.

While not exactly sure how the concept would evolve, he sensed opportunity and knew instinctively that his personal approach to physical fitness and wellness could be shared with others and also be a profitable career path. He was right on both accounts and his Cochrane-based business continues to grow.

"To me, fitness and wellness are much more than workouts and weights," said Gladue, standing in the centre of the spacious facility located above the Spray Lake Sawmills Family Sports Centre.

"I lead by example in living a healthy lifestyle, one that ensures my wheel of wellness is complete in the physical, the mental, the emotional and the spiritual. We focus on all of these with all our clients, so you get much more when we work with you in such an all-encompassing way."

A member of the Bigstone Cree Nation, Gladue is understandably proud of his heritage and what he has created. The business has grown by leaps and bounds since the club opened its doors in 2005. Annual memberships and general pass holder numbers have more than doubled in three years. Capacity at the many courses and programs put on by Lifestyles Fitness and Health Concepts continues to rise and is nearing 100 per cent. Gross revenue in the first full year of operation was $177,000. For 2008, the business is anticipating gross revenue around $370,000. The operation now has nine full-time employees and eight instructional contractors. Personal development for staff is as important as the complete wellness services they provide to clientele.



*Cardio and free weight equipment at the centre*

"Wellness is a guiding principle for all our team so we hold regular development sessions that enhances spiritual, emotional and mental well-being." said Gladue.

Trainers and group exercise instructors are constantly upgrading knowledge of new techniques and the company funds entry fees to annual fitness conferences. It has put together numerous health, wellness and fitness programs for all sorts of users and organizations. Some groups include those with chronic health issues, youth athletes, multi-sport endurance athletes, sport and employee groups, seniors and those in post-rehabilitation, to name a few. The company has developed partnerships with and programs for organizations like the Cochrane Chamber of Commerce, Bow Valley High School and Calgary Health Services.

*Managing Director Patrick Gladue leads a class*

The company has also worked with Aboriginal communities in promoting fitness and well-being. They have established workshops and programs for the Bigstone Cree Nation and worked with the Fort McKay First Nation to create protocols and procedures. They have created run-specific programs in Cochrane, Sylvan Lake and Red Deer. For 2009, the goal is to broaden services to First Nations across Alberta through presentations and programs focused on health, fitness & well-being. No doubt it will happen given the company track record to date.

Life Styles
HEALTH & FITNESS CONCEPTS

THE ALBERTA BUSINESS AWARDS OF DISTINCTION
Eaglefeather Award finalist

# AQUA INDUSTRIAL

## A leader in northern Alberta business

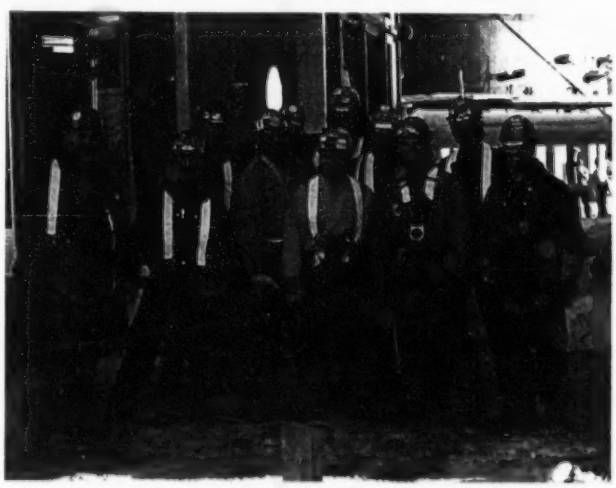
Aqua Industrials Ltd. President and Owner Gerald Gionet has a fundamental motto that dictates his life and how he runs his business.

"People helping people" is his credo. By sticking to this course of action, he has built a burgeoning business working in the oil and gas sector in northern Alberta. In doing so he has gained the respect and admiration of his peers, his employees, politicians and most everyone he meets.

*Steel erectors at work*

Based in Fort McMurray, Aqua Industrials has been a leader in the oil and gas, mining and pipeline industries based in and around the oil sands projects in northeastern Alberta. As one of a handful of 100 per cent-owned Aboriginal companies operating in the skilled trade designation there, the company started out working on small projects doing mechanical work, steel construction and erection. They have grown considerably over the past eight years by using the latest technologies and state-of-the-art equipment. Additionally, they have maintained a competitive edge through fair and reasonable pricing and accelerated completion schedules.

"Our goal always is to execute and complete steel construction projects that meet or exceed our client's specifications and expectations," said Gionet. "While we started small, the efforts and dedication of our employees has helped us grow to where we are doing jobs that used to be for non-local and international companies only. I get a lot of satisfaction from the growth of the company and through that, in helping my people improve."



*One of Aqua Industrial's work crews*

The company now employs 100 people, over 60 of them Aboriginal. They have worked on hundreds of steel erection and construction projects with all the big corporations working in the oil sands: Suncor Energy – Suncor Extraction Plants platform upgrade; Steepbank Millennium Base Plant re-fit; Shell Canada – Jackpine Breaker Building erection; Canadian Natural Resources – Horizon GOGEN Plant Modular Installation, and many others. In all of these jobs, the safety of all employees and sub-contractors and protection of the environment has been of primary importance.

*Steel erector at work*

Aqua Industrial and Gerry Gionet are dedicated to helping employees improve through training and mentoring programs. They work with oil sands companies, Aboriginal agencies and training organizations to ensure they attain their maximum potential and guarantee a new generation of skilled, highly productive workers. The company donates over $150,000 annually to a variety of organizations both locally and to organizations assisting Aboriginal youth and the disadvantaged as far away as Vancouver. Gionet is past president of the local Métis Association, vice president of the Northeastern Alberta Aboriginal Business Association, and a board member of the Alberta Apprenticeship Board. He also finds time to be a hockey coach, chairman of the fundraising committee for the Métis Association golf tournament scholarship program, a Rotarian and a role model within the Aboriginal and greater community.

Gerry Gionet is justifiably proud of his $40 million company and the workforce he has nurtured. The community is proud of him too, of his success, his support, his generosity and his willingness to help. "People helping people" – it's a good philosophy.

AQUA INDUSTRIAL LTD.

THE ALBERTA BUSINESS AWARDS OF DISTINCTION
Eaglefeather Award finalist

# ASENIWUCHE DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

## Moving progressively forward

In English, the Cree words Aseniwuche Winewak mean "Rocky Mountain People."

The Aseniwuche Development Corporation (ADC) is the economic development arm of the Aseniwuche Winewak Nation (AWN).

The AWN is a proud group of non-status Indians numbering about 400 that have settled near Grande Cache in the Rocky Mountain foothills. They hold fee simple title to their land, transferred from Alberta in the early 1970s. They have overcome constant relocations and the relatively late imposition of modernity onto their traditional way of life. Their strength of community and self, retention and respect of their history

*One of the corporation's work crews*

and a willingness to adapt and prosper has always been unwavering. They are using this tenacity to grow as a Nation and as a regional economic force.

The ADC began operating in 1998, just four years after the AWN was formed. It is a community-owned corporation that creates economic opportunities for AWN members. There are three main streams currently providing employment, partnership opportunities and revenue. The company has a well-trained, well-equipped labour force along with heavy equipment available to the energy, mining, forestry and utility resources companies. They also provide environmental services including field research and data collection, vegetation management and reclamation project work. Finally, Aseniwuche Welding Services is a new business venture resulting from an intensive welding/fabrication course initiated by the AWN.

"Each of these ventures contributes to the community well-being and we re-invest revenues to ensure optimum performance in every undertaking," said ADC President David MacPhee.

Activity in the resource sector continues to increase through partnerships and a growing reputation for professionalism and quality work. ADC is involved in site and right-of-way clearing and construction, heavy equipment operation, timber harvesting, brushing and slashing, and traffic control, among others. They provide specialized labour and equipment for projects throughout their traditional territory, from Grande Prairie in the north to Jasper in the south and east of Hinton.

*Clearing brush on a right of way near Grand Cache*

A key benefit of ADC's environmental services is the incorporation of traditional knowledge into all aspects of service delivery. ADC staff members have invaluable knowledge of the traditional lands and scientific expertise which results in value-added work for clients and the best possible development and mitigation plans. It also honours community values and the desire for preservation of ecosystem integrity, while respecting other development interests.

The welding service component has grown from a training program delivered by the AWN through their jobs corps initiative. Partnering with Alberta Employment and Immigration and supported by contract work from companies like EnCana, the 12-20 week-long programs see graduates building drilling platforms, skid mounted units, pipe racks and many other custom fabrication projects. All staff are COR and ISN certified and – like all of the company's nearly 100 employees – have the latest in safety and environmental training.

The corporation injects millions of dollars in wages into the community while supporting cultural, social, educational and charitable events in all the communities within their traditional area. More importantly, the AWN is building capacity and self-reliance while remaining true to their principles and values, summarized by the belief that "the collective is more important than the individual."

ASENIWUCHE
DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

THE ALBERTA BUSINESS AWARDS OF DISTINCTION
Best Practices Award finalist

# CANADA SAFEWAY

## A true commitment to working with Aboriginal people

As one of the largest employers in Western Canada (almost 15,000 Alberta employees) and an established leader in the grocery/retail market, Canada Safeway has recognized the growth rate of the Aboriginal population and is embracing strategies to retain and integrate the population into its operations.

The company is celebrating its 80th year of operations in Western Canada and since its inception has been providing community support, particularly in contributions of product and funding to local food banks and healthy living initiatives. It has broadened its scope of involvement in the past decade, recognizing changing demographics and working proactively to incorporate the skills and abilities of Aboriginal people across their Alberta operations.

"We have long been aware of the importance of workplace diversity and of our desire to best represent the people who live in the communities we serve," said Canada Safeway President and Chief Operating Officer Chuck Mulvenna.

"Aboriginal people are the fastest growing segment of the country's population so they represent a large portion of the future workforce. We are proactively working with many organizations to ensure we harness the talent and skills available and that we will continue to do so in the future."

*Staff at an Aboriginal job fair display*

The approach has been multi-faceted and the results have been impressive.

In June 2007, Canada Safeway and the federal government signed a national partnership agreement as part of INAC's Aboriginal Workforce Participation Initiative. The parties are working collaboratively to build relationships that empower Aboriginal employees and provide employment and career opportunities while identifying mutually beneficial business opportunities.

Canada Safeway was one of the co-chairs of Alberta Workforce Connex, held in Red Deer in 2007. Workforce Connex is a series of national forums bringing together private companies, government agencies and Aboriginal organizations such as the Aboriginal Human Resource Development Council of Canada. The two-day session created numerous opportunities for partnerships with local labour solutions the desired end result. From this forum and through other initiatives, Canada Safeway hired over 1,400 Aboriginal employees in 2007. An additional 1,200 Aboriginal staff joined the company in 2008.

*Canada Safeway display on National Aboriginal Day*

Canada Safeway has been working with many partners in hiring and training Aboriginal workers: the Treaty 7 Community Futures program; Aboriginal Futures - together with Alberta Employment and Immigration - offering the Calgary urban Aboriginal community free training in certain career skill sets; signing a memorandum of understanding with the Oteenow Employment Services on hiring and training; the Calgary Urban Aboriginal initiative; SAIT Chinook Lodge; the Aboriginal Youth Employment Centre and a host of others. The company has actively participated in over 15 Aboriginal job fairs in the past two years and is a regular advertiser in Aboriginal publications like SAY Magazine, the Native Journal and through the Aboriginal job bank.

While increased Aboriginal employment and enhanced career opportunities are critical given Canada Safeway's huge network of retail stores, distribution centres, gas stations, production plants and corporate offices here in Alberta, just as important is the support the company provides to Aboriginal communities through active participation and sponsorships. Equally important is the company's desire and willingness to make understanding, knowledge and comprehension a cornerstone of their ongoing partnerships with Aboriginal people in Alberta.

SAFEWAY.

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THE ALBERTA BUSINESS AWARDS OF DISTINCTION
Best Practices Award finalist

# DEVON CANADA

## "Commitment runs deep"

*Blessing of the Jackfish site*

Devon Canada Corporation employs more than 1,400 people in Alberta, producing the equivalent of 200,000 barrels of oil a day through a production mix that is 60 per cent natural gas and 40 per cent oil and natural gas liquids. The company headquarters are in Calgary, with regional offices throughout the province. Their slogan, "commitment runs deep," certainly applies to operations here, particularly in its relations with Aboriginal communities.

The corporation's comprehensive Aboriginal relations program and its staff establish, enhance and maintain mutually beneficial relationships with communities impacted by Devon operations. They have been tailoring partnerships for over six years with admirable results.

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"Communication and understanding while providing investment, training and business and employment opportunities are the cornerstones of our community relations programs," said Devon Canada President Chris Seasons.

"Early on we realized the necessity and importance of extensive consultation to gain community support. There have been challenges along the way, but by keeping the spirit of inclusiveness and cooperation at the forefront, we can recognize the mutual long-term benefits of everyone's efforts."

Essential to the partnerships they have established with Aboriginal communities (many relatively remote and isolated) and businesses they partner with, is a foundation built on early, open and ongoing communication with community leaders and elders. Mentoring Aboriginal youth is also a critical area of community relations, in part to provide for future workers possessing the necessary skills, but also to stress the benefits of continuing education and ongoing training. One of the best ways to do this is through the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology's "NAIT in Motion" mobile education unit trailers.

*Devon President Chris Seasons (centre back row) with the Conklin graduating class*

Devon Canada is a founding partner in this bold initiative that brings the classroom to the people. Providing capital funding for the construction of two "classrooms on wheels," Devon has been a mainstay of the program from the beginning. A 24-week intensive session that focuses on personal development, academic upgrading, trade skills and hands-on experience in the electrical, welding, pipefitting and millwright trades, it has been a huge success.

Devon Canada sponsored the inaugural session held in Conklin in 2005. Ten of the 12 students graduated and were soon employed. Since that first class, the two units (each with six workstations accommodating 12 students) have delivered trades training in over 20 areas and to dozens of remote Aboriginal communities in Western Canada, mostly in Alberta. The program has over 225 Aboriginal student graduates, many of whom would never have had the opportunity without the program.

Devon Canada is also a key sponsor of other Aboriginal training/education programs. These include the petroleum employment training program, a 10-month program held by local colleges and supported by a coalition of industry partners, local and regional government and Aboriginal organizations, and the Aboriginal community management program, a first-of-its-kind venture by the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology to provide better management and protection of information and records. The company is also actively involved in the Alberta native provincial hockey tournament which attracts over 160 teams from over 30 Aboriginal communities. It's all ample proof their commitment does indeed run deep.

devon

## CANDO – Getting involved in the Alberta Awards of Distinction

Formed in 1990 to institute a national structure for Aboriginal economic development officers, the Council for the Advancement of Native Development Officers (CANDO) now has nearly 450 members in all 13 provinces and territories. The organization's mandate is to build capacity by strengthening Aboriginal economies with programs and services for Economic Development Officers – they are the leading authority on Aboriginal community economic development. The organization has 90 members in Alberta, is Aboriginal-controlled, community-based and membership driven. CANDO has recently become involved in facilitating the nomination process for the Alberta Awards of Distinction, one of many services provided to members.

CANDO | Council for the Advancement of Native Development Officers

Please address all letters, comments and requests to:

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THE ALBERTA BUSINESS AWARDS OF DISTINCTION
Eagle Feather Award finalist

# SAMSON MANAGEMENT LTD.

## Growth Through Good Management

Samson Management Ltd. is a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Samson Cree Nation. The company is involved in economic development and investments that benefit the community at large, providing quality management to ensure success and ongoing growth. They strive towards achieving their vision statement of being "the premier leader in business and investment management."

Based on business investment growth, they are well on their way to achieving this lofty goal.

The company has positioned itself well – through ownership, investment and infrastructure development – to meet and serve the needs of the community. Operating in a central corporate office, the company owns and operates five businesses, all linked wirelessly with the corporate office. The Okeymowkisik gas bar and convenience store, Roots and Berries pharmacy, the Samson Subway food outlet, the Maskeptoon automotive centre and real estate/property management division not only provide employment and essential services, they also reflect cultural pride and concrete evidence of the company's expanding role within the community.

*The Okeymowkisik gas bar and convenience store, one of five businesses SML owns and operates*

On the investment side, Samson Management Ltd. has entered into a number of beneficial partnerships including service developments with the Cold Lake First Nation, the purchase of shares with Vast Exploration Inc., the purchase of funds with Investors Group and the purchase of limited partnership units and bonds with Crown Properties Inc. All of these activities have seen a steady rise in the profitability of the company, from a net income under $200,000 to almost $1 million in five short years.

*The boardroom in the corporate office centre*

A large part of this growth is due to a commitment to management and a Board of Directors who are highly professional and well educated in business, law, finance and administrative management disciplines.

The majority of them are Samson Cree Nation members or of First Nation descent. Guided by an elder, the corporate management team is a reflection of the company's employees, primarily First Nation, well educated and ambitious.

The company is an integral part of the community, providing steady employment opportunities and supporting members through training and entrepreneurial support and development. It actively supports and funds education, health and cultural activities, with an ongoing emphasis on pride in their heritage and community. Recognizing changing demographics, Samson Management Ltd. has embarked on providing housing opportunities for members both on and off reserve through its off reserve housing program. To date, 52 individuals have received assistance towards owning their own home.

Addressing the need for expansion, the company has begun activities aimed at increasing the size of the reserve through fair market value purchases of individual and business-owned land and structures bordering the reserve. They have also commissioned plans and engineering studies which will result in the construction of a professional medical centre and a courthouse with office space for provincial and federal civil servants.

"Using collective knowledge and business acumen in a variety of initiatives and incorporating our traditional values with the business practices of mainstream is what make Samson Management Ltd. successful," said General Manager Dorothy Simon. "Our ultimate mission is to build a sense of pride in our people and community."

Her thoughts reflect a mandate that is being realized daily through the good governance and planning of Samson Management Ltd.

*(Continued from previous page)*

"Communication and understanding while providing investment, training and business and employment opportunities are the cornerstones of our community relations programs," said Devon Canada President Chris Seasons.

"Early on we realized the necessity and importance of extensive consultation to gain community support. There have been challenges along the way, but by keeping the spirit of inclusiveness and cooperation at the forefront, we can recognize the mutual long-term benefits of everyone's efforts."

Essential to the partnerships they have established with Aboriginal communities (many relatively remote and isolated) and businesses they partner with, is a foundation built on early, open and ongoing communication with community leaders and elders. Mentoring Aboriginal youth is also a critical area of community relations, in part to provide for future workers possessing the necessary skills, but also to stress the benefits of continuing education and ongoing training. One of the best ways to do this is through the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology's "NAIT in Motion" mobile education unit trailers.

*Devon President Chris Seasons (centre back row) with the Conklin graduating class*

Devon Canada is a founding partner in this bold initiative that brings the classroom to the people. Providing capital funding for the construction of two "classrooms on wheels," Devon has been a mainstay of the program from the beginning. A 24-week intensive session that focuses on personal development, academic upgrading, trade skills and hands-on experience in the electrical, welding, pipefitting and millwright trades, it has been a huge success.

Devon Canada sponsored the inaugural session held in Conklin in 2005. Ten of the 12 students graduated and were soon employed. Since that first class, the two units (each with six workstations accommodating 12 students) have delivered trades training in over 20 areas and to dozens of remote Aboriginal communities in Western Canada, mostly in Alberta. The program has over 225 Aboriginal student graduates, many of whom would never have had the opportunity without the program.

Devon Canada is also a key sponsor of other Aboriginal training/education programs. These include the petroleum employment training program, a 10-month program held by local colleges and supported by a coalition of industry partners, local and regional government and Aboriginal organizations, and the Aboriginal community management program, a first-of-its-kind venture by the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology to provide better management and protection of information and records. The company is also actively involved in the Alberta native provincial hockey tournament which attracts over 160 teams from over 30 Aboriginal communities. It's all ample proof their commitment does indeed run deep.

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## CANDO – Getting involved in the Alberta Awards of Distinction

Formed in 1990 to institute a national structure for Aboriginal economic development officers, the Council for the Advancement of Native Development Officers (CANDO) now has nearly 450 members in all 13 provinces and territories. The organization's mandate is to build capacity by strengthening Aboriginal economies with programs and services for Economic Development Officers – they are the leading authority on Aboriginal community economic development. The organization has 90 members in Alberta, is Aboriginal-controlled, community-based and membership driven. CANDO has recently become involved in facilitating the nomination process for the Alberta Awards of Distinction, one of many services provided to members.

CANDO | Council for the Advancement of Native Development Officers

Please address all letters, comments and requests to:

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THE ALBERTA BUSINESS AWARDS OF DISTINCTION
Eaglefeather Award finalist

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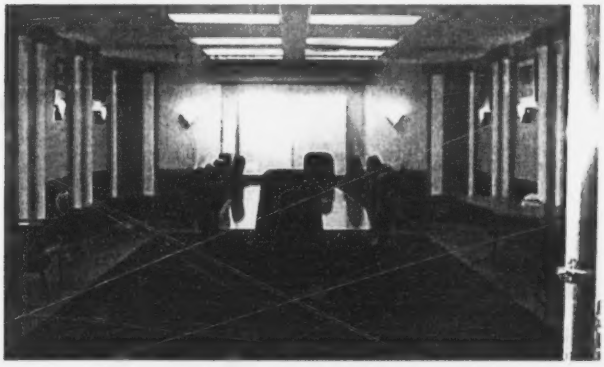

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